

**Virginia Board of Education
Student Advisory Committee
Minutes: April 27, 2004**

The Board of Education Student Advisory Committee met on April 27, 2004 to develop positions and recommendations for the three areas they have been studying during the 2003-2004 school year. The following members of the committee attended the meeting:

Natalie Baird, Sterling Middle School; Elana Bloomfield, Albemarle High School; Lawren Collins, Lake Taylor Middle School; Maggie Graham, Marion Middle School; Rachel Gutasukas, Buford Middle School; Andrew McCormack, Osbourn Park High School; Sarah Romers, Varina High School; Sandy Su, York High School; Blake Waller, Halifax High School; Paige Wigginton, Pulaski High School; Isaiah Wilson, Brooke Point High School.

Mrs. Susan Genovese, Board of Education Vice-President, and Anne Wescott, Cindy Cave, Melissa Velazquez and Michelle Parker, Department of Education staff, also attended.

The Student Advisory Committee convened in their three work groups to discuss the research they had done since the last meeting and to develop their reports and recommendations for presentation to the Board of Education at its meeting on Wednesday, April 28, 2004.

The members of Work Group One developed their position and recommendations on multi-cultural education and diversity. The members of Work Group Two developed their position and recommendations on teacher quality, and the members of Work Group Three developed their position and recommendations on improving the standards for school guidance counseling programs.

The entire Student Advisory Committee then convened to hear the presentations from the three work groups and to make any suggestions for changes to the final reports. The reports for presentation to the Board of Education at its April 28, 2004 meeting are attached. The meeting adjourned at 2:45 p.m.

**Statement from the 2003-2004 Student Advisory Committee
of the Virginia Board of Education**

Multicultural Education

Issue of Discussion:

Promotion of multicultural education in Virginia public schools

Background:

America is a unique and diverse nation comprised of people from many countries and backgrounds. Diversity encompasses more than race; it includes religion, nationality, gender, and sexual orientation. Since the country's establishment, many have sought to bring equality into American society and schools. Although a great deal of legislation has been passed in the last century emphasizing equality, the climate of education is still impacted by the vestiges of the former system.

Position of the Student Advisory Committee and Rationale:

Although multiculturalism exists and is promoted as an ideal, it is often not recognized and applied as it should be. The Student Advisory Committee feels that multicultural education in schools, especially beginning in elementary and secondary schools, leads to long-term benefits for the community. It has been our personal experience that schools with programs devoted to promoting diversity have a more open community and are able to see the world from multiple perspectives. Currently, there is a lack of initiative for multicultural curricula in individual schools. Therefore, it is our opinion that the Virginia Board of Education should take a proactive stance on this issue.

Formal Recommendation of the Student Advisory Committee:

It is our recommendation to the Board of Education that an award program be formed for schools that make an effort to promote diversity throughout the school and community. The goal of this program is to increase the awareness of diversity issues and to bring them more effectively and meaningfully into the school community. This award program is designed to encourage schools to take the initiative and to place multicultural education as a priority for their community.

Award Qualifications

In order to receive the award, schools must complete several projects including one mandatory project. There are two categories from which projects should be chosen. The activities outlined in the first group are designed to impact the community at a more institutional level. The second grouping outlines possible outreach and enrichment activities. From the first grouping, one activity should be chosen from the list. From the second, three projects should be chosen.

The only required activity is to create a student group that is devoted to promoting multicultural activities. The group should be composed of students who are willing to take the initiative to promote diversity and multiculturalism in their schools and

community. While there may be guidance from adult teachers or mentors, the majority of the work should be done by the students. The group should have an advisor, if possible, who can lead discussions within the group about important issues. This person should also be a resource for the student if an issue arises within the group. The activities taken on by the group should reflect the interests of the members and their community. Through varied activities, the group should provide the community with information and resources regarding multiculturalism. The students' activities should serve both as a center for diversity awareness activities and as a catalyst for community change. Because of the student initiative and involvement in this activity, the award will be a meaningful reminder of the importance of multiculturalism and an early lesson in social justice activism.

Group One:

Outreach into Lower Schools—As a way to promote diversity awareness to a younger and more impressionable age group, there should be outreach into local elementary or middle schools. This can be done through small discussion groups, book discussions, art activities, dramatic presentations, or other media.

Diversity Week—This project will encourage students and staff to make diversity awareness a priority for one week during the school year. Ideas for this week include but are not limited to outside speakers, organized discussions, cultural activities, and cultural food dinners. This activity provides students, staff, and teachers with an opportunity to learn about each other and to come together in a more educated and accepting way.

Community Diversity Forum—This activity will encourage the community to have a dialogue about the multicultural issues that affect both students and at-large community members. It will allow residents to learn from each other's experiences as well as to emphasize diversity issues that need to be addressed. From this activity, there should be some continued dialogue or activity in order to benefit from the discussion.

Group Two:

International Dinner—This event will encourage students in the school community to share their food with others and to learn about other cultures, as well. Activities during the dinner could include cultural dances, presentations by speakers, or cultural lessons (ex. chopsticks lessons, French culture booth, etc.).

Fundraiser for a Diversity-Focused Organization—There are many organizations whose purpose is to promote diversity awareness. This fundraiser can be conducted with the school or in the surrounding community.

Speaker—This presentation should address the majority of the students and teachers within the school. It offers an opportunity for the community members to learn something about a particular person or about an issue.

Bulletin Boards—These boards, which should be easy to view, can contain information on specific multicultural topics, the diversity-themed months, or other diversity-related topics that are important to the community.

Cultural Presentation—This presentation should address the majority of the students and teachers within the school. The presentation could be in any form but should address something related to multiculturalism.

Attend Multicultural Conference—There are dozens of diversity-related conferences that are held each year. Conferences are often held at local colleges or universities and they invite community members to participate. These events are wonderful opportunities for learning, sharing, and networking with the other conference attendees.

ESL Activities—Many schools run an English as a Second Language program. The goal of the program is to teach international students English while providing them with peers. The ESL students often become isolated from the school community, however, and have little interaction with students outside of their classes. Because these students represent a wide range of diverse backgrounds, social events, cultural performances, and presentations can be very valuable opportunities for a diversity-focused group.

Trips to Museums or Historic Sites—There are many museums and other important sites that have cultural significance. These trips provide group members with a sense of the historical or ideological background for important topics.

Cultural Carnival—A carnival has the potential to impact a large number of people in a way that is both enjoyable and informative. Creative activities such as a cake walk with cultural desserts or a quiz game with multicultural topics encourages people to investigate others from different backgrounds.

**Statement from the 2003-2004 Student Advisory Committee
of the
Board of Education**

Teacher Quality

Issue:

The quality of teachers and the evaluation process of teachers throughout the state

Background:

At the February meeting of the State Board of Education, the definition of teacher quality was discussed. Currently, a highly qualified teacher has earned a baccalaureate degree in their subject area and has met the licensure requirements with a Board of Education approved teacher education program.

In our opinion, a highly qualified teacher should be knowledgeable about his or her subject, able to convey the material, and possess a professional attitude while maintaining a positive classroom atmosphere.

We understand that teacher quality has been a matter of concern for the entire state of Virginia for many years. Since The No Child Left Behind Act has been mandated it has become more important to have highly qualified teachers in all public schools. In order to achieve this goal the State Board of Education has provided all school divisions with a standard teacher evaluation. This evaluation is not mandatory, but is there for the individual divisions to use as a basis for their own process of evaluation.

Position of the Student Advisory Committee:

The Student Advisory Committee believes that improving the teacher evaluation process will secure the goal of having a highly qualified teacher in each classroom. With the school divisions having the capability to evaluate teachers on their own standards, there is a lack of consistency throughout the state. If the No Child Left Behind Act requires all teachers to be “highly qualified” how can you hold them to one standard if the requirements are all different? An important issue that we feel isn’t covered in the teacher evaluation process is whether or not teachers are always assigned classes in their subject area. Another topic of concern is teachers allowing students to form their own opinions about debatable topics, instead of influencing them to believe what the teacher believes. Finally, teachers should be able to accommodate varying class sizes and change their teaching styles to reach all students. Teachers need to create a positive classroom atmosphere while keeping a balanced relationship with the students to stay on topic.

Recommendations:

The Student Advisory Committee recommends that:

- The Uniform Performance Standards for teachers should be mandated statewide in addition to the individual localities’ evaluations. The state mandated guidelines have authority over the local evaluations.

Before these guidelines are enforced, they must be amended to include more specific details about what the guidelines mean and how they are fulfilled. For example, what is defined as coherent instruction, or how do you measure professionalism? To receive a well-rounded evaluation there should be input from the students and parents on the teaching abilities and the execution of the mandatory requirements. It is important to have this input because the students and their parents are the people most directly affected by the quality of the teachers. These statements would not affect the teachers' employment status; they would only bring attention to issues that affect the students that the evaluator may have missed. To help with the quality of teachers, a program should be implemented to give teachers more time to communicate with other teachers to share ideas, lesson plans and strengthen their teaching capabilities.

**Statement from the 2003-2004 Student Advisory Committee
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School Counseling Programs

Issue of Discussion:

Improving the Standards for School Counseling Programs in Virginia Public Schools

Background:

A school counselor by definition is a certified professional educator who addresses the needs of students through the implementation of a developmental school-counseling program. Counselors generally implement four processes to help students. These processes are counseling (individual and group), large group guidance, consulting, and coordinating. Qualifications include requiring a Master's Degree in School Counseling. The Virginia Department of Education certifies counselors PreK-12. Students must complete internships on two levels: PreK – 6 for the elementary level and 7 – 12 for secondary schools. Staffing ratios for schools are 1 full time counselor to 500 students for elementary schools, 1 full time counselor to 400 students for middle schools, and 1 full time counselor to 350 students for secondary schools. The counseling program shall provide for a minimum of 60 percent of the time of each member of the guidance staff devoted to such counseling of students. This 60 percent includes testing, screening, coordinating, enforcing discipline, serving as attendance officers and substitute teachers, preparing administrative reports and serving as test coordinators. The specification of the other 40 percent of guidance functions is the responsibility of the school division and individual school administrators, working with the school counselor to identify duties.

Position of the Student Advisory Committee:

While we understand the importance of other duties performed by guidance counselors other than interacting with students, student-counselor relations need to be stressed more to insure that all students feel that their needs are met in the three core areas of counseling: Academic Development, Career Development, and Personal/Social Development. Especially in high school when students need to start planning their future, guidance counselors play a key role in someone's life. We believe that the role of a guidance counselor in Virginia Public Schools should be reevaluated because they serve such a significant position. We believe that the qualifications for guidance counselors are adequate to today's standards, however the responsibilities that many of Virginia's Guidance Counselors are taking on, are listed neither in the qualifications or job description and are overwhelming. Many guidance counselors today say that they are not performing the job they signed up for. Guidelines for guidance are laid out yet they need to be implemented and improved.

Formal Recommendation of the Student Advisory Committee:

To implement the changes to be brought on, the Student Advisory Committee recommends the following plans:

- Ratios of guidance counselors need to be lowered to a more workable size to meet these demands.
- The appointment of a Test Coordinating position and/or committee in each school division.
- Re-evaluate the role of a Guidance Coordinator. The Guidance Coordinator is included in the student to guidance ratio but students never meet with this counselor nor does this position perform the 60 percent required counseling time.
- The time spent dealing with students should be raised.
- The implementation of a quota by the Board of Education should be used to evaluate the counselor's activities on a yearly basis. Included in this quota, we recommend that guidance counselors be required to meet with each assigned student a minimum of once a semester or twice a year.

We believe that if these recommendations are met, Virginia will better the educational quality and social quality of our schools.